

# Davis hits out over 'silly' EU stance on Brexit divorce bill

by DAVID HUGHES

DAVID DAVIS has accused Brussels and its chief negotiator Michel Barnier of taking a 'silly' approach to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

The Brexit secretary said the EU was trying to exert pressure over the demands for a so-called divorce fee – and dismissed as 'nonsense' claims that the UK would pay £50 billion.

It comes as the latest bitter round of talks ended in a frosty press conference, with Mr Barnier claiming there had been no 'decisive' progress on key issues and suggesting there was a lack of trust as a result of the UK's refusal to accept financial obligations.

But Mr Davis told BBC1's Andrew Marr Show: 'They have set this up to try to create pressure on us on money, that's what it's about, they are trying to play time against money.'

Comparing Brussels' demands to a hotel bill presented to a guest on checking out, Mr Davis said: 'We are going through it line by line and they are finding it difficult because we have got good lawyers.'

He said Mr Barnier 'wants to put pressure on us, which is why the stance in the press conference, bluntly, I think



Riposte: Davis criticises Barnier BBC/PA

it looked a bit silly because there plainly were things that we had achieved'.

Mr Davis insisted the 'strict position' was that there was 'no enforceable' legal basis for the UK to pay money to Brussels but 'we are a coun-

try that meets its international obligations – but they have got to be there'.

Those obligations 'may not be legal ones, they may be moral ones or political ones', he said.

His comments came as Theresa May sought to prevent a Tory rebellion ahead of the first Commons votes on the Brexit legislation. The prime minister's allies have warned rebels that they risk putting Jeremy Corbyn into No10 if they attempt to water down the so-called Repeal Bill.

Meanwhile international trade minister Greg Hands said the UK would pay what is due but would not send 'vast sums' to the EU for years to come.

Speaking on BBC Radio 5 Live's Pienaar's Politics, Mr Hands said: 'We are happy to contribute to particular programmes where it's in the UK's national interest but we will pay, if necessary, a net amount that is legally due as a result of our contractual negotiations.'

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## Sturgeon set to scrap pay rise cap

NICOLA STURGEON will scrap the one per cent cap on public sector pay rises when she sets out her legislative plans tomorrow.

The first minister will announce the measure when she reveals her 2017/18 programme for government, a source told the Sunday Herald.

The SNP committed to lifting the pay cap earlier

this year. Labour described the SNP move as a 'long overdue U-turn' after the party's bid to end the pay cap was defeated in a Holyrood vote in May.

Scottish Labour interim leader Alex Rowley said: 'It is welcome to see that [finance secretary] Derek Mackay has finally followed Labour's lead to end the pay cap.'

## Labour leader contest cranks up

THE two frontrunners to take over the helm of Scottish Labour have set out their pitches for the top job.

MSPs Anas Sarwar and Richard Leonard have emerged as the most likely candidates to succeed Kezia Dugdale.

Ms Dugdale announced last week that she was stepping down. Confirming his

intention to stand in an article for the Sunday Mail, left-winger Mr Leonard said Scotland needed 'a united Labour Party committed to real and bold change'.

Writing in the same newspaper, Mr Sarwar praised Ms Dugdale and UK leader Jeremy Corbyn for helping to restore 'a confidence in the party that we can win again'.

## PM IGNORED GURU'S ELECTION WARNING



THERESA MAY ignored warnings that calling a snap general election carried 'a lot of risk', a leaked memo has revealed.

Written by campaign guru Sir Lynton Crosby days before Mrs May announced her decision, the memo said voters did not want an election while the UK was in a period of uncertainty after the Brexit vote.

It warned there was a risk the Tory vote share would end up 'similar' to that achieved in David Cameron's narrow win in 2015, rather than the landslide sought by Mrs May. When told about the June 8 election plan

by Tory campaign chief Lord Gilbert, Australian Sir Lynton replied: 'I'm not sure that's a smart idea, mate,' the Mail on Sunday reported yesterday.

Mrs May consequently lost her Commons majority – but last week vowed to lead her party at the next election.

As she was pictured leaving church with her husband Philip yesterday, a Survation poll showed the Tories trailing Labour by five points. But Brexit secretary David Davis told the BBC she was a 'great prime minister' who has 'done a good job' running the country.

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